

African Social Science Review

Volume 4 | Issue 1

Article 6

April 2010

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Recommended Citation

Umo, Uju Clara (2010) "Classroom Environment as Correlate of Students' Cognitive Achievement in Senior Secondary School Igbo Language," *African Social Science Review*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/assr/vol4/iss1/6>

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Classroom Environment as Correlate of Students' Cognitive Achievement in Senior Secondary School Igbo Language

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Abstract

The environment plays an important role in the learning of languages especially Igbo language. Environment as used in this study means all the classroom conditions that facilitate teaching and learning. This analysis, therefore, seeks to find out the relationship between students' perception of their classroom and their academic achievement in Igbo language. Both human and material resources as well as interaction and attitudinal behavior in the classroom setting make up the classroom environment. In order to carry out this study, two research questions were posed and a null hypothesis was formulated. The design of the study is a correlational survey. The population comprised the entire SSII Igbo language students from five schools drawn randomly from the entire schools in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. The mean, standard deviation, Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient and t-test statistic were used in analyzing the data. The result revealed that there is an average perception of Igbo language students on their classroom environment. Also, there is a significant relationship between their mean perception and their academic achievement. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made which include that Igbo language teachers should be made aware of the influence of their environment on the achievement of students through seminars and workshops.

Keywords: Learning of languages, Igbo language, academic achievement

Introduction

The importance of classroom setting in the study of languages cannot be over emphasized. What one learns is influenced by the environment. Ngwoke (1995) describes the physical environment of education to include space, time, classroom, chairs, seating arrangement, play ground, school plant, etc. Language environment is a powerful factor in language development. Both nature and nurturing have great influence on personality traits like intelligence. A

African Social Science Review

language rich environment is a warm literate environment, which stimulates interaction. No wonder Busching and Lundeteen (1983) were of the view that language flourishes in settings where children are exposed to mature language model. As a result, classrooms should provide a variety of supplementary materials, and students should have access to materials that stimulate language exploration. Furthermore, the physical environment encourages language development, and classroom arrangement should give students easy access to the resources in the class. Apart from the physical environment, there is the psychological environment which involves interaction behavior patterns and other intra classroom activities both tangible and intangible. In addition to this, Offomata and Phil-Eze (2001) observed that environmental concern remains one of the major focuses of contemporary scholarship. They believe that there are some environmental settings and factors which help in enhancing language development. These factors according to them include location, gender, home and classroom settings, and they affect, in no small measure, the academic achievement of Igbo language students.

It is often noticeable that children of the same age group do not always possess the same Igbo language vocabulary. Children brought up in the urban areas have fewer vocabularies than their rural counterparts because of the peculiar nature of the environments in which they live. It is also apparent that activities like hunting, fishing, moonlight plays and so on, which enrich Igbo vocabularies, are usually seen in the rural areas but are not always observed in the urban areas.

In fact, inherited attributes like intelligence, personality, learning style, among others, are mostly inherited but they can be improved through nurturing in an appropriate environment. By implication, any child with a high intelligent quotient may get retarded intellectually and linguistically if placed in a poor environmental setting.

School environment consists of the entire interaction settings such as classroom, fields, teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil relationships within the school. The community in which the school exists has a lot of influence on the school environment. In Nigeria, the junior secondary school curriculum is structured to include two Nigerian languages as core subjects, while the senior secondary school provides for a compulsory study of one Nigerian language. In selecting two Nigerian languages, students are required to study the language of their own area in addition to any of the three main Nigerian languages: Hausa, Ibo, and Yoruba, subject to the availability of teachers. This language policy has a lot of implications for teacher training in language education. For instance, large classroom size is one of the problems in Igbo language learning, and the provision of resources like language laboratories, and textbook materials as well as motivation of pupils to actually learn their languages, which in their minds they already know, further escalate the problem.

The system of evaluation adopted for the assessment of Igbo language learning is continuous assessment, which is formative in nature, and a “one-shot-evaluation” process

Classroom Environment as Correlate of Students' Cognitive Achievement in Senior Secondary School Igbo Language

which is summative by design. The achievement of students in these examinations has not been encouraging especially in the external examinations. In fact, student performance in Igbo language external examinations has been a serious concern to educators over the years. (see WAEC Chief Examiner's Report, 1993; 1996; 1997). This observation is consistent with other scholars' reports such as Anasiudu (1986), Nwadike (1982), and Emenanjo (1987). Moreover, Obiefuna (2002) argued that large classroom size not only militates against effective teaching, but it also affects the learning process of any subject.

Many researchers had earlier questioned the pedagogical issues in Igbo language studies. Factors pointed out by scholars include but are not limited to lack of interest (Adiele, 1972), dialectal problem (Emenanjo, 1987), and inadequate teaching method (Okorie, 1979). Whether it is any of the above mentioned factors, the fact remains that they all revolve around the classroom environment. Therefore the problem examined by this study is whether there is any relationship between classroom environment and students' achievement in Igbo language.

The purpose of the study is twofold: 1) to find out the perception of students on their classroom environment, and 2) to determine the relationship between the students' perception on their classroom environment and their academic achievement.

Research Questions

1. What is the mean perception of students on their Igbo classroom environment?
2. What is the relationship between the students' perception on their Igbo classroom environment and their academic achievement in Igbo language?

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between the mean perception of students on their classroom environment and their academic achievement in Igbo ($P < 0.05$).

Methodology

The design of this study is a correlational survey. It involves eliciting the opinion of respondents on their perception which is the criterion score, while their end of term result in Igbo forms the predictive score.

African Social Science Review

The study was carried out in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State, and the study population comprised all the Senior Secondary II (SSII) Igbo language students in the secondary schools in the area.

Simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting four schools out of the ten secondary schools in Udi Local Government Area. The entire SSII Igbo language students in the four schools numbering 200 formed the sample.

The instrument for data collection is a likert-type questionnaire, which was validated by experts in language education, measurement, and evaluation. The questionnaire contains 28 items. The questionnaire is scaled from strongly agree (SA: 4), agree (A: 3), disagree (D: 2) to strongly disagree (SD: 1), for positively cued items, and vice versa for negatively cued items. There are seven sub-scales in the questionnaire. To obtain the total score for each scale, simply add the scores for four items in each scale. The items are arranged in cyclic order so that the first, second, third and fourth item, respectively, in each block assesses personalization, cohesiveness, task orientation, and innovation. These are major tasks in assessment of classroom environment. Items whose numbers are underlined are scored 1, 2, 3, and 4 (negatively), respectively, while others are scored 4, 3, 2, and 1 (positively), respectively.

It is pertinent to note here that the students end of the year scores in Igbo language were used as predictive variable. The research questions were answered using mean, standard deviation and Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient, while t-test was used to test the hypothesis.

Study Results

Research Question 1:

What is the mean perception of students on their classroom environment?

Table 1: Means and standard deviation of students' perception on their classroom environment.

	X	SD
1. The instructor considers students feelings	3.055	0.539
2. The class is made up of individuals who don't know each other well.	3.015	0.429

Classroom Environment as Correlate of Students' Cognitive Achievement in Senior Secondary School Igbo Language

3. Students know exactly what has to be done in our class.	1.46	0.804
4. New ideas are seldom tried out in this class	2.905	0.54

Grand 2.6

0.767

5. The instructor talks individually with the students	1.975	0.67
6. Each student knows the other members of the class by their first names	2.87	0.50
7. Getting a certain amount of work done is important in this class	3.91	0.389
8. New and different ways of teaching are seldom used in this class	1.315	0.975

Grand 2.52

0.975

9. The instructor goes out of his/her way to help students	1.74	1.168
10. Friendships are made among students in this class.	3.15	0.87
11. The group often gets side tracked instead of sticking to the point.	1.85	0.65
12. The instructor thinks up innovative activities for students to do.	2.36	0.74

Grand 2.275

0.556

African Social Science Review

13. The instructor helps each student who is having trouble with the work.	1.93	0.427
14. Students don't have much chance to get to know each other in the class	2.06	0.58
15. This is a disorganized class.	3.52	0.797
16. Teaching approaches in this class are characterized by innovation and variety.	1.31	0.716

Grand 2.205**0.81**

17. The instructor seldom moves around the classroom to talk with students	2.205	0.799
18. It takes a long time to get to know everybody by his/her first name in this class	3.09	0.63
19. Class assignments are clear so everyone knows what to do	2.01	0.685
20. The seating in this class is arranged in the same way each week.	1.06	0.25

Grand 2.07**0.83**

21. The instructor isn't interested in student's problem.	2.17	0.539
22. Students in this class get to know each other well	3.545	0.835
23. This seldom starts on time	3.085	0.669

Classroom Environment as Correlate of Students' Cognitive Achievement in Senior Secondary School Igbo Language

24. The instructor often thinks of unusual class activities	1.97	0.42
Grand 2.69		0.647
25. The instructor is unfriendly and inconsiderate towards students	3.03	0.468
26. Students in this class aren't very interested in getting to know other students.	3.15	0.686
27. Activities in this class are clearly and carefully planned	2.87	0.808
28. Students seem to do the same type of activities every class.	3.545	0.726
Grand 3.01		0.114
Overall Mean 2.50		

The Table 1 shows a mean of 2.50 as students' mean perception on their classroom environment. The subscales have means of 2.60, 2.52, 2.275, 2.205, 2.07, 2.69, and 3.01 with standard deviations of 0.76, 0.97, 0.55, 0.81, 0.83, 0.64, and 0.11, respectively. The means hover around an average level of classroom environment, while the standard deviations indicate close affinity of responses as they are not wide spread.

Research Question 2:

What is the relationship between the students' perception on their Igbo language classroom environment and their academic achievement in Igbo language?

After correlating students' mean perception and their academic achievement in Igbo language using Pearson's product moment correlation technique, a correlation coefficient of 0.55 was obtained, this coefficient is positive and moderately high.

Explaining the Study Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between the mean perception of students on their classroom environment and their academic achievement in Igbo language ($P < 0.05$)

Table 2: t-test of significance of relationship between the mean perception of students and their achievement in Igbo language

No of cases (N)	Corr-coeff (r)	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision	Coeffi of Determination
200	0.55	198	7.13	1.96	S	0.3025

The above table reveals that the t-calculated (7.13) is higher than the t-critical (1.96); therefore the null hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 probability level.

Discussion

The discussion was based on the data collected from both research questions and hypothesis. The result shows that the mean perception of students on their Igbo classroom environment is fair. This shows that their classroom environment is just fairly conducive for academic work. A closer observation of the items shows that out of the seven clusters only three have mean perceptions that are clearly above the benchmark of 2.5. Items like number 1, on instructors considering students feelings had mean perception of 3.055, which is quite high. On the contrary, the seating arrangement has a mean score of 1.06, which indicates high monotony. The result also shows that there is positive and fairly high correlation between students' classroom environments and their academic achievements in Igbo language. This means that fairly conducive Igbo classroom was likely to be responsible for fair performance in Igbo. Because the perception is moderate and correlation coefficient moderately high, it means that if the classroom environment is very highly conducive the achievement in Igbo will also be very high.

This finding corroborates an earlier finding by Chukwura and Mba's (1997) observation that there is a link between achievement in Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK) and classroom environment. Furthermore, both Auten (1985), and Busching (1983) agreed that language flourishes in settings where children are exposed to model language classrooms. It

Classroom Environment as Correlate of Students' Cognitive Achievement in Senior Secondary School Igbo Language

also stimulates exploration. Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are in order:

- Igbo language teachers should be made aware of the influence of the classroom setting on the achievement of students through seminars and workshops.
- Teachers should ensure that lessons in Igbo language take place in good classroom settings.
- Textbook writers in Igbo language should be encouraged to utilize the principles of interactive learning in their textbook writing and/or preparation.
- Teachers should vary their method of teaching by introducing innovative techniques such games in teaching their teaching styles.
- Teachers should maintain good relationship with the students.
- Teachers should do their best to make the classroom environment more conducive for learning.

It is hopeful that if the above recommendations are implemented, learning experiences in Igbo language will not only be more meaningful to the students, but the learning process will be improved. In sum, the Enugu State Ministry of Education has a role to play too, by providing the financial support to secondary schools to enable them conduct the seminars and workshops on Igbo language as suggested in this study.

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African Social Science Review

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